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ABSTRACT

The course on marital Communication outlined in this manual focuses participants' attention on the communicative bonds that maintain a functional relationship. The course is divided into three units: "Partner as Audience," designed to help individuals in a relationship see themselves as audiences sensitive to each other's messages; "Goals," which gives attention to systematically locating and focusing on strengths and weaknesses within problematic situations; and "Message Strategies," designed to develop skills in giving and receiving feedback in a marital relationship. The manual suggests instructional procedures and activities for the course, describes each unit's content and rationale, suggests an instructional procedure for each unit, and provides exercises that may be used in class. The exercises involve participants in such activities as assessing their own values and perceptions about marriage and discussing them in small groups, role playing marital situations, setting goals for the improvement of their relationships, and sending and receiving messages in constructive ways. (GW)

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MARITAL COMMUNICATION:

AN ADDITION TO THE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUAL

The manual you are about to read proceeds in accordance with the actual unfolding of the course, MARITAL COMMUNICATION. For each unit, course content and rationale are presented first, followed by a suggested instructional procedure. Our philosophical approach is different than some courses in the interpersonal curriculum; we believe that it is not merely understanding or self awareness which allows marriage or other intimate relationships to function in a mutually satisfying fashion. Three years of marriage counseling and two years teaching this course have assured us that couples can often discuss and understand problems but still be stymied when it comes to finding solutions. We also believe that communication strategies by themselves are not the answer. It has been our experience that these skills, while clearly useful, are limited in their capacity to make enduring relational changes without a theoretical framework with which the couple can learn to describe and understand their communication. Our approach suggests what to some couples may be a radical change both in mind set and behavior, a change that converts the couple from a reactive to a proactive self healing system. The rhetorical paradigm is chosen for its theoretical and practical insight with regard to goal directed human interaction.

THE RHETORICAL PARADIGM

Audience: When marriage is analyzed from a rhetorical perspective, tolerance is increased as individuals begin to recognize the interdependent aspects of their relationship. They begin to see themselves as audiences sensitive to each other's messages in a complex and dynamically changing system.

Goal: Monitoring and goal setting provide a means of systematically locating and focusing in on strengths and weaknesses within problematic situations.

Message as Strategy: Listening and speaking acuity is enhanced as skills are developed to deal with the revelations of increasing communicative awareness and the desire to achieve relationship goals. The specificity inherent in problem solving and goal setting allow assessment of change.

Wherever possible we will attempt to substantiate our position with available empirical evidence, but it is important to recognize that research in this relatively young area is still forthcoming and in some instances we are out on the proverbial limb. Nevertheless, we are confident that if the program herein is followed rigorously, it has the capacity to enhance intimate relationships.

UNIT ONE -- PARTNER AS AUDIENCE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Divorce statistics suggest that marriage is a failing venture in our society (Judicial Committee, California, 1966). An even more discouraging body of research suggests that those who elect to stay together often do so out of convenience or a shortage of less painful alternatives (Lederer and Jackson, 1968). Small wonder that theorists are beginning to suggest that effective twoing is no longer a norm, but an ideal rarely achieved. Is it the fast pace of our society, a sparcity of intimate models, or the changing roles of men and women? We can only speculate as to cause but it is interesting to note that while we are taught many things in our formal education we are expected to instinctively know how to relate effectively to other people. It is our orientation to avoid the irreconcilable search for root causes and to focus our energy instead on the communicative bonds which maintain a functional relationship. This positive educational emphasis on intimate communication provides us with the awareness which gives us distance and this distance increases our alternatives.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE

A common problem which we attempt to deal with at the outset of this course is the misconception that there is a "right" way to be married. We explore some common misconceptions through a Goldberg-type problem composed of statements related to what Lederer and Jackson refer to as "The Myths of Marriage" (Lederer and Jackson, 1968). Secondarily, this exercise also serves an important ice-breaking function while avoiding the frivolous tone often accompanying exercises of this type.

EXERCISE I

SHARING VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE WITH OTHERS OUTSIDE OF THE MARITAL SYSTEM

Directions: In the space provided at the beginning of each statement, indicate your feelings by underlining one of the following:

SA - Strongly Agree

A - Agree

D - Disagree

SD - Strongly Disagree

After you have recorded your personal perceptions get together with your group and, by sharing your ideas, attempt to arrive at a group consensus on each issue.

NOTE: You should not be in the same group as your partner for this exercise.

1. SA A D SD Marriage means both commitment and obligation.
2. SA A D SD Dependency is the major problem in living intimately with someone.
3. SA A D SD Love is the essential ingredient in an effective marriage.
4. SA A D SD Differences in upbringing represent the main source of marital conflict.
5. SA A D SD The romance of courtship rarely carries over into marriage.
6. SA A D SD Honesty in an intimate relationship is vital - even if it means inflicting pain.
7. SA A D SD Predictability is of enormous value in maintaining a relationship.

Exercise I - Debrief:

Why do you suppose it is so difficult to reach consensus on these issues?

The purpose of this exercise is to help discover that even within our culture there is an enormous divergence of opinion concerning major issues related to marriage. This course attempts to clarify perceptions of what constitutues a viable or "good" marriage for each intimate dyad.

A useful way to debrief this exercise to to have each group send a representative to the board to write in the group's consensus responses on a grid.

Sample Grid

Statements \ Groups	1	2	3	4	5
1	SA	SA	SD	SD	SD
2	A	A	SA	A	SA
3	A	SA	D	A	D
4	A	SA	SA	SD	SD
5	SD	SD	A	D	SD
6	SA	A	SA	A	D
7	SD	SD	SA	A	SA

Statement one, for example, is likely to provide a more stimulating discussion than statement two. The instructor might say, "Well, Groups one and two, you strongly agreed while Groups three, four, and five strongly disagreed that marriage is both commitment and obligation. What are your reasons for this position?" The grid, in other words, provides a quick way to see where potentially interesting discussion might be generated.

ANALYZING THE PARTNER-AS-AUDIENCE: RULES AND EXCHANGES

We use the term "audience" to suggest the interdependent nature of intimate partners as receivers of each other's messages. This interdependency is clarified by introducing the term "system" which is derived from the field of physics to explain the interaction of two components in a sealed container. This is referred to as a "closed system." The analogy is useful to explain that intimates are similar to the components in a sealed container in that one is always affecting and being affected by the other. The difference of course, is that people never interact within a vacuum. Therefore, we can think of them as operating within an open system where external influences need to be considered. External influences refer to persons, places, or things past and present that affect the relationship (Rabkin, 1970). The most obvious example of a past system influencing an intimate relationship is the family of each partner. The most obvious example of present systems influencing an intimate relationship are the contacts each person has when they are not together. The point is that these other influences from other communication systems past and present are not suspended when intimates are together. There are other properties of an open system relevant to our discussion:

> Intimates cannot not communicate. Even silence sends a definite message even though it is often not the one which the speaker intended.
>
> Intimates communicate in both verbal and non-verbal dimensions. Non-verbal dimensions include such things as gestures, posture, and eye contact, in addition to voice tone.
>
> When verbal dimensions of a message are incongruent or inconsistnt with non-verbal dimensions, communication distortion is inevitable. (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967).

RULES

All messages exchanged between intimates become part of a larger system of intricate rules which govern the relationship. These rules suggest who has the right to say what to whom, and under what circumstances (Haley, 1963).

Because every communication between intimates either establishes, maintains, or negates a relationship rule, interpersonal conflict erupts over seemingly

innocuous issues. In other words, it is not what we say, or even how we say it, but what the message says about our relationship.

We can identify three levels of rules:

1. Those rules which an intimate dyad is aware of.
2. Those rules which an intimate dyad is not aware of but will admit to when they are pointed out by an outside party.
3. Those rules which an intimate dyad is not aware of and will not admit to.

The point is that being aware of how messages establish relationship rules provides us with an important first step toward alleviating potentially explosive conflict situations by meta-communicating (communicating about our communication).

EXERCISE 2: ROLEPLAY

DISCOVERING RELATIONSHIP RULES

Instructional Procedure:

Our experience suggests that one of the more efficient ways to explain relationship rules is through the medium of roleplay. Choose one man and one woman and ask them to consider the following situation:

Flo:

Sal is never home. If he's not working he's out playing poker. What kind of fool does he take you for? This isn't what you bargained for when you agreed to marriage, but now you're saddled with two kids and a transient husband that you see less than the gardener. Is he bored with you? Is he playing around? You don't know, but you're at the end of your rope. Either he stays home more, or you want out. Now is the time to set him straight.

Sal:

Flo has been such a pain in the ass lately -- always whimpering and whining about something. Thank goodness that between staying late at the office and playing poker, you've been able to keep away six nights out of seven. Not that you don't appreciate Flo. She's a good mother and in her better moments a pretty good wife. But you don't like being smothered. When you agreed to this marriage it was with the proviso that each would maintain some independence. Now seems like a good time to remind Flo of those earlier commitments.

Debrief:

Identify relationship rules and other properties of an intimate communication system which may be present in this roleplay situation. It is useful to pretune

the class with what they should be looking for in the roleplay:

--relationship rules observed

--non-verbal messages communicated

--congruency/incongruency between verbal and non-verbal messages.

EXCHANGE THEORY

Viewing a relationship as a communication system is one way of discovering the partner as audience. Another very useful way is to make explicit some of the underlying reasons why the relationship feels good or bad, fair or unfair, equitable or inequitable to each partner. Reciprocity of positive exchange is repeatedly implicated as the single most important description of good marriages (Lederer and Jackson, 1968; Weiss, Hops, and Patterson, 1973).

Our starting point is a basic need which all people experience in their relationships, married or otherwise: the need for self esteem or identity confirmation.

> This notion is particularly important in an intimate relationship where partners have considerable power to reinforce or damage each other's identity.
>
> What we need is a way for both partners to understand and reinforce each other's positive perception of self.
>
> Homans' exchange theory offers a way of conceptualizing this: "interpersonal profit through equitable exchanges" (Homans, 1961).
>
> Interpersonal profit is a crucial issue. If people perceive a profitable, fair interpersonal deal, their identity is likely to be confirmed. If they feel they're being taken advantage of or used, their self esteem is lowered.

Interpersonal Profit = Reward-Cost

Cost =

1. time and effort put into the relationship given the other options available
2. costs inherent in rewards given

Reward = four modes of exchange:

1. cash
2. goods
3. services
4. sentiments

Couples want what they perceive to be a fair deal. This is facilitated through equitable exchanges, which suggest to both partners that the relationship is enhancing to the way they wish to be perceived. This does not mean that couples run around with a tally sheet. We are talking about perceived profit over time, what Homans refers to as "distributive justice." Recent research utilizes a similar metaphor with what is referred to as a "bank account model" where deposits must exceed negative codes or withdrawals (Weiss, Hops, and Patterson, 1973).

This brings us to metacommunication. If we feel uncomfortable in our intimate relationships (temporarily or otherwise) we now have discovered sayables in two dimensions:

1. making rules explicit
2. making exchanges explicit

This is not to say that we should always metacommunicate every moment of every day but when the need or problems arise, we have the capacity to discuss them with a degree of objectivity. This represents an important step in the marital invention process.

Instructional Procedure:

The two-part exercise which follows provides couples with an opportunity to 1) explore their opinions and ideas concerning exchange theory and 2) apply the principles of exchange theory to their own relationship.

EXERCISE 3

EXCHANGE THEORY EXERCISE

This activity is broken into two parts. In Part I your group of six people (couples stay together) have the task of reaching consensus on the following items:

1. SA A D SD In a genuine love relationship it is possible to give and want nothing in return; the joy is in the giving.

2. SA A D SD To view marital communication in terms of "profit" and "exchange" destroys the spontaneity and feeling necessary for a meaningful relationship.

3. SA A D SD Some people are obviously "used" by their partner; this is an instance of not caring about interpersonal profit.

When you have achieved consensus, turn in your responses to us before beginning Part II.

Part II: Divide your group into dyads (couples stay together) and discuss the following:

Now that you have been introduced to the notion of interpersonal profit, married partners reflect on your marriage while those without a partner present reflect on a past or current relationship. By discussing the exchange of cash, goods, services, and sentiments, elucidate reasons why aspects of this relationship feel or felt rewarding or costly.

Questions which you might wish to consider in this exercise include:

1. What is our pattern of exchanging rewards? For example, are we more services-oriented than goods-oriented? Are we similar or different in terms of which mode we consider most or least valuable?

2. Are there periods when our relationship seems more equitable than at other times? Identify the behaviors (modes of exchange) operating during "good" and "bad" times.

3. What might we do to enhance or equalize the kind of exchanges transpiring in our relationship?

UNIT TWO -- GOAL

GOAL SETTING

Now that we have provided a means for understanding the interdependent communications of a relationship in general terms, let us turn to the task of specifying goals for change. It is most difficult, if not impossible, to alter vaguely defined needs, desires, or situations. When a goal or target is clear, however, change potential is greatly increased (Mager, 1972). The first task is for each partner to identify one potential area of relationship enhancement. Their second task is to specify behaviors, pleasing and displeasing, within that enhancement area. The third step is to convert negative behaviors into positive suggestions. The fourth task is for each partner to select from the other's list one behavior to increase. The final step is to develop a means for monitoring improvement. Following is a list of potential enhancement areas relevant to the marital dyad (see AREAS OF ENHANCEMENT, page 16).

1) Identifying Areas of Enhancement: Each partner reviews the "Areas of Enhancement" list and identifies what he or she perceives to be the most interesting (either positive or problematic) area in the relationship.

2) Specifying Pleasing and Displeasing Behaviors Within the Enhancement Area: After each partner has chosen one enhancement area to work on, they each proceed to list three behaviors that are pleasing under that area and three that are displeasing or unhelpful. Couples often need help at this point in describing specific behaviors rather than offering general character descriptions. In the following examples each item is a description of some partner behavior.

Area	Item
Husband's work:	Please - Husband takes time to keep me informed about his work so that I can understand.
	Displease - He works so often that we have no more than one night a week together.
Children:	Please - He spends time with the kids helping them to learn new skills.
	Displease - He rarely changes diapers.
Finances:	Please - Partner pays bills on time.
	Displease - Partner doesn't consult me before making large purchases.

The following item is not a description of partner behavior and would therefore have to be further refined:

Partner is inconsiderate.

This is a judgment drawn from specific actions. Those actions are the behaviors which need to be specified.

3) Converting Negative Behaviors into Positive Suggestions: Since it is easier to increase positive behaviors than it is to decrease negative behaviors (Gottman et al., 1976), individuals now convert the specific negative behaviors within their chosen area into positive suggestions. So, for example, instead of saying, "he flirts at parties," a person would state, "I would like him to pay more attention to me (i.e., talk to me more) at parties." Students might wish to consider Exercise 4 (page 17) before moving to step 4.

4) Deciding Which Behavior to Increase: Each partner selects from the other's list one specific behavior to increase. Once the selection has been made it is often a good idea to make the behavior even more specific than it is on the "Areas of Enhancement" form. It is important that each partner at this juncture choose a relatively easy behavior to increase. More difficult behaviors should be reserved until they are more familiar with this technique. Then each member of the dyad decides on a reward they will receive if they are successful at increasing the behavior in question. Again they should be instructed to select a reward for this first goal agreement that does not place a burden on their partner. Some possibilities which have been used in the past are: an hour or two of free time on the weekend or evenings to spend alone; buying something new; having the partner fix something for them (provided this is not a burden). After they have decided on the rewards each will receive for fulfilling the goal agreement, they enter them on the NEGOTIATION FORM FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT (page 19).

Note: If a partner feels the other is not keeping their end of the agreement, they should not quit. Advise them that specific communication strategies for dealing with problems like these will be provided beginning with the next session.

AREAS OF ENHANCEMENT

A. Running Household, Family Economics, & Family Living
   1. Finances and money management
   2. Household management and decision-making (Meals, shopping, household chores, transportation)
   3. Husband's work
   4. Wife's work
   5. Child care and training (Disciplins, recreation, clothes, etc., medical care)
   6. Family recreation and leisure time
   7. Adult recreation and leisure time
   8. Friendships

B. Value & Philosophy
   9. Education
   10. Religion
   11. Traditional vs. contemporary outlook
   12. Politics
   13. Charity

C. Person Factors
   14. Temperament and personality differences
   15. Affection and closeness
   16. Acceptance-rejection
   17. Sexual adjustment (including contraception)
   18. Jealousy and extramarital affairs
   19. Personal habits
   20. Personal improvement
   21. Health

D. Kinship Responsibilities
   22. Husband's mother
   23. Husband's father
   24. Wife's mother
   25. Wife's father
   26. Other relatives and dependents

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EXERCISE 4

POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS

Take some time now and practice turning the following specific negative gripes into positive suggestions.

Specific Negative Gripes	Positive Suggestions
1. You rarely pay me a compliment.	I will pay you at least one compliment a day.
2. You write checks without figuring out the balance.	
3. You don't touch me, kiss me, or hug me except when you want sex.	
4. You invite people over for dinner without first finding out what my plans are.	
5. At a party, you get mad if I'm talking to someone else.	
6. You don't ask for my opinion on major decisions.	
7. You don't help me prepare any meals.	
8. You broke the table; you said you'd fix it, and you haven't.	
9. At breakfast you bury your head in the newspaper.	
10. You never throw out your beer cans.	
11. When you drive to school, you often park illegally and get a ticket, which we can't afford to pay.	
12. You never bring the rent over to the landlord.	
13. Often, when I try to study, you decide to vacuum and I can't concentrate.	

Gottman et al., 1976, p. 79.

5) Monitoring Goal Achievement: It is hard to know whether or not a goal is being achieved unless individuals monitor their progress. Therefore, ask them to take the next three days to keep track of exactly what they are doing in relation to their targeted behaviors. This will give them a baseline rate. At the end of this period they exchange data and decide on how much of an increase is needed to consider this aspect of the goal achieved. Then ask them to spend the next seven days trying to do their best at increasing the behaviors in question (see sample graphs, pages 20-21). At this point they will have some strategies for dealing with problems this change might incur.

At the end of 10 days, couples compare graphs and determine if frequency is at a mutually acceptable level. Individuals who have achieved their agreed-upon increase arrange to receive their reward. At this point, the couple may wish to continue on the same behavior or agree to go on to a new aspect within the enhancement area. When couples become familiar with this goal setting technique they may wish to increase the number of behaviors being monitored at any one time. When enough behaviors within an area have been increased to a mutually satisfactory level, the couple may move on to another enhancement area, recognizing that at some future point they may wish to again focus on this behavior area.

The next unit of the course is designed to arm students with a series of specific communication strategies to make their adaptation to the changes they have chosen as smooth as reasonably possible. Specifically, we will be talking about listening and speaking skills which are useful in further clarifying and fulfilling relationship goals and keeping communication channels open. Throughout the next two units students are expected to continue their weekly monitoring and to submit weekly reports graphing their progress.

NEGOTIATION FORM FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Name: _____

Date: _____

Husband

The one behavior I have agreed to accelerate from partner's three cards is:

_____

_____

_____

The reward I will receive for carrying out this agreement is:

_____

_____

_____

Signed _____

Wife

The one behavior I have agreed to accelerate from partner's three cards is:

_____

_____

_____

The reward I will receive for carrying out this agreement is:

_____

_____

_____

Signed _____

Gottman, et al., 1976, p. 81.

GOAL SETTING

At this point you have selected one or more behaviors you will increase. Please write this behavior in the space provided. If you are increasing more than one behavior you will need more charts.

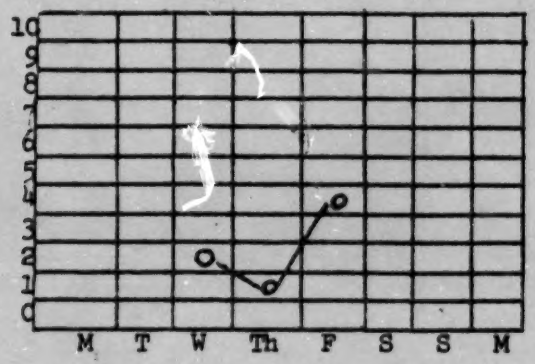
Behavior I will increase is: _____

In Part I of this exercise you are to count the frequency of your chosen behavior for each of the next three days. At the end of each day you will chart the frequency of the behavior you picked to increase. For these first three days you should not try to increase the behavior; simply chart the frequency with which it occurs. Another index card will be used to graph the daily frequency of your chosen behavior.

Part I:

Below is an example of how the index card might look after the three days of counting the behavior you picked to increase.

Name: John Parks Behavior graphed: compliments



Dates: March 5, 6, 7

In this example, on Wednesday, March 5, John paid his spouse 2 compliments, on Thursday, the 6th, 1 compliment, and on Friday he paid his spouse 4 compliments.

GOAL SETTING

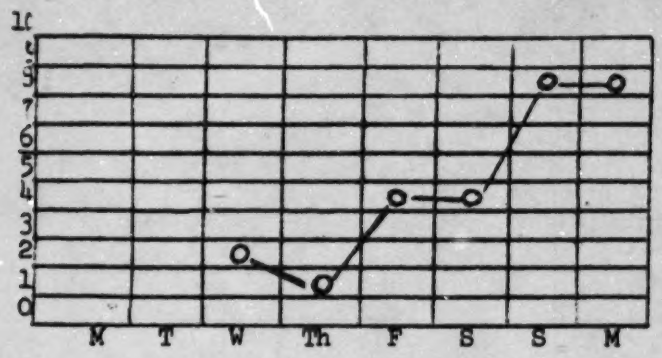
(continued)

Part II:

Here you will try to increase the behavior as much as you can. Again during each day you will note every time you perform the behavior you chose to increase, and at the end of every day you will chart the total frequency for the day. John's index card might now look like this:

Name: John Parks

Behavior graphed: compliments



Dates: March 5 through 10

From the graph we see that John didn't have much success increasing the number of compliments he paid to his wife on Saturday, but doubled the frequency of the three-da counting period on Sunday and maintained this level on Monday.

Gottman, et al., 1976, pp. 72-73

UNIT 3 -- MESSAGE STRATEGIES

UTILIZING MESSAGE STRATEGIES IN THE MARITAL DYAD

Giving and receiving feedback in a marital relationship is often hard to do. It might appear that offering positive feedback would be easy, but for several reasons it is often difficult. Some people perceive it as weakness to expose feelings. Others perceive that it is putting them in a one-down position, that in some way they are relinquishing relational power. In addition, individuals have a tendency to overlook the positive and dwell on the negative. It is easy to let positive events fade into the background; negative events tend to stand out in bold relief. Yet giving positive feedback is vital: behavior is most effectively shaped through positive feedback and least effectively shaped through punishment (Mahoney, 1974). Further, individuals will be more attracted to their partners and will tend to reinforce their partners more if they have received positive reinforcement from them (Stuart, 1969). In Stuart's examination of distressed marriages, it was discovered that when partners reinforced each other at a low rate, each became relatively unattractive to the other and consequently the low rate of reinforcement continued.

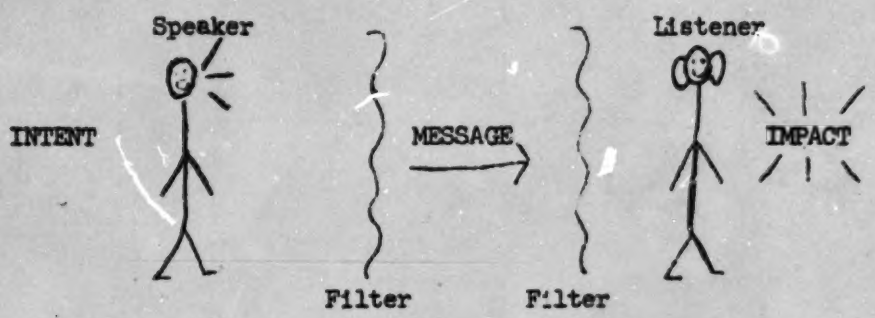
Receiving positive feedback is also difficult because, among other reasons, our culture places such a high premium on humility. People can be taught, however, to increase the occurrence of positive feedback by reinforcing its expression, for exmaple, "Thank you for saying that to me. I'm pleased that you feel that way." If couples are to increase their rate of positive feedback to each other, it is crucial that they learn reinforcing ways of receiving it.

Negative feedback is even harder to give than positive feedback but it is one of the only corrective procedures available to a couple. It is difficult to give because people often fear exposing weaknesses, arousing anger or resentment, hurting another person. Negative feedback is difficult to receive because of our tendency to resist evaluations contrary to our positive perceptions of who we are. Yet without negative feedback we can only make wild guesses as to how

we might be instigating the dissolution of an intimate relationship. This unit is designed to teach couples more effective ways of delivering and receiving these kinds of messages.

ACTIVE LISTENING: RECEIVING PARTNER MESSAGES

Listening skills are taught prior to speaking skills since it seems important for people to have strategies for receiving their partner's messages if the couple is to work productively with the new information presented. An Intent-Impact Model is presented as a cognitive organizer (Gottman, et al., 1976, p. 1).



As an introduction to listening and speaking skills, the class discusses reasons why intent so often does not equal impact. Couples are then taught several listening skills intended to clarify the impact of messages.

1) Stop Action: All discussion stops and talk becomes centered on the discussion itself -- Metacommunication.

2) Paraphrasing: The listener in his or her own words tells the speaker what impact the message has had. This includes both the content and feelings communicated to the listener.

3) Validation: This involves communicating to one's partner that his or her perspective may seem reasonable. Validation does not mean agreement. It is merely admitting the possibility that another point of view may make sense. It is important to emphasize that paraphrasing without validation limits effectiveness.

Instructional Procedures: The unit on "Utilizing Message Strategies in the

Marital Dyad" utilizes, whenever possible, a three-tiered format, leading couples from minimal to high self involvement. This approach begins with written practice in which couples are given a chance to test their understanding of the skill being taught in a low-threat situation. Then students are put in small groups to use a particular skill or concept by applying it to an instructor or student roleplay. Finally after couples have achieved some competency level with a particular skill, they are put in marital dyads to work on issues which are relevant to their relationships. They are then encouraged to use the skills in working through their area of enhancement.

Paraphrasing and Validation

1. Instructors roleplay a marital situation suggested by the class. This is first done without paraphrasing and validation. Then it is re-enacted using paraphrasing and validation skills.

2. Students are put into dyads to practice the process of paraphrasing and validation. They may or may not be with their marital partner for this activity.

   The following listening exercises are used because they present the students with potential areas of disagreement to discuss, the areas of disagreement being far enough removed from the marital relationship to allow learning a new skill to occur in a low-threat situation. (See Exercises 5, 6, and 7 on pages 26, 27, and 28.)

3. This activity provides couples with an opportunity to explore feelings and perceptions regarding the specific areas they chose to work on from their "Areas of Enhancement" form. They are reminded of the importance of using paraphrasing and validation skills throughout the exercise.

4) Perception Checking or Checking Out: This represents an attempt to clarify the partner's behavior before incorrect interpretations are made and acted upon. Since it is unrealistic to say, "don't make interpretations," we'll say instead, "make your interpretations tentative and check them out with your partner." This is done by making a partner aware of the specific behavior seen and the conclusion being drawn from it. This process of perception checking is to determine whether or not the conclusion is accurate.

Instructional Procedures: 27

1. After discussing the main components of perception checking, the

EXERCISE 5

PARAPHRASING AND VALIDATION

Directions: Share your feelings and perceptions concerning the following statements. When you are the receiver of the message, be sure to paraphrase and validate.

1. People should seek to discover their authentic self rather than changing their behavior from system to system.
2. People have the right to be silent and unresponsive if they choose to be.
3. Honesty is vital - even if it means inflicting pain.
4. If it feels good, do it.
5. When you come right down to it, men and women simply are not equal.

EXERCISE 6

PARAPHRASING AND VALIDATION

Directions: Fill in the blanks below and share your responses. When you are the listener, be sure to paraphrase and validate.

1. Five years from now I see myself.....
2. I feel that the women's movement.....
3. One thing that I really feel strongly about.....
4. In a group of people, I usually get most involved when.....
5. I would really like to.....
6. Some of my thoughts when I first meet someone are.....
7. When I find myself in a new group of people I.....
8. Friendship.....

EXERCISE 7

PARAPHRASING AND VALIDATION

Directions: Respond to each statement according to the following scale:

SA strongly agree

A agree

U uncertain

D disagree

SD strongly disagree

Now share your responses. When you are the receiver of the message, be sure to paraphrase and validate.

____ 1. Women are more sensitive and understanding than men.

____ 2. If an effective form of birth control for men (i.e., pill) is developed, men should assume the responsibility for birth control rather than women.

____ 3. There are some jobs more suited to men than women. Therefore, women should not be allowed to perform these jobs.

____ 4. Bussing is a viable means of achieving racial integration in public schools.

____ 5. It is fair to say that a teacher teaches but a student may still not learn the material taught to him/her.

____ 6. Teachers should grade minority students differently than white students.

____ 7. People should be allowed to perform the act of suicide; suicide should not be illegal.

____ 8. Homosexuals should be allowed to raise children.

____ 9. Oregon should be allowed to limit its population growth by placing a limit on the number of out-of-state people who can become citizens of the state.

instructors roleplay a marital scene which clarifies the process of checking out inferences. Couples make written notes about specific instances of perception checking to be used in the class discussion which follows the roleplay.

2. Checking perceptions on inferences: in this activity students are given a handout containing inferences that might be commonly made in marital dyads. (See Exercise 8, page 30.) In groups of three, students develop (in writing) a perception check for each inference presented on the handout. Each group then reads their three best perception checks to the class. Class discussion centers around the strengths of each perception check and what could be added or deleted to make it more effective.

3. Students, in marital dyads, check out perceptions they currently have concerning some aspect of their partner's behavior, thoughts, feelings. That is, they are sharing an inference that they are currently operating under as well as the specific behaviors that led them to that inference. Couples refer to their "Areas of Enhancement" forms.

5) Non-Verbal Attention: Since there is a non-verbal component present in every message, in this section couples discuss the importance of body position, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice. The difference between content and relationship levels of meaning is discussed.

Instructional Procedures:

1. Non-interacting dyad: Marital partners are paired up and instructed to take turns telling the other about an especially important or exciting idea, feeling, experience. The other partner is instructed to give no signs of non-verbal attention: no smiles, head nods, "um-hums," postural orientation, facial expressions. After each person talks for 3 to 5 minutes the class discusses what it felt like to (a) receive no non-verbal attention and (b) give no non-verbal attention. Couples then share the same information, but this time the listener focuses on attending non-verbally to the speaker. Class discussion then focuses on the difference between the two experiences.

6) Coping With Criticism: In a marital dyad part of what a listener will hear is criticism. In fact, in a recent study (Vincent, Weiss, Birchler, 1975) it was discovered that both distressed and non-distressed couples made more critical statements to their partners than to people they did not know well. It is important, then, for couples to have an effective way of receiving and managing criticism. Following the segments of instruction focusing on listening skills,

EXERCISE 8

CHECKING PERCEPTIONS ON INFERENCES

Directions: Below you will find a list of inferences that one partner in a marriage might make about the other. For each inference write a perception check that would help to clarify the validity of the inference.

1. You don't seem interested in what I have to say.
2. Why are you so excited?
3. You seem really tense tonight.
4. You're afraid your parents will disapprove of the way we're living.
5. You're getting angry about nothing.
6. You're not feeling as close to me as you used to.
7. I want you to be more relaxed around me.

couples are taught behaviors for coping with criticism. First the couples explore some typical responses to criticism, for example, withdrawal, justification of self, and counterattack. Given the non-productive nature of these responses, alternative strategies are offered:

I. When criticized, ask for more information

A. Ask for specifics: couples are encouraged to discover with whom and in what circumstances the problem behavior occurs.

B. Guess about specifics: if a partner is unable or unwilling to describe exactly what's causing the problem, couples are encouraged to make some guesses and check them out.

C. Paraphrase the critic's ideas: couples are taught to clarify their understanding of the critic's message, to learn more about his or her objections. Paraphrasing criticism often is an effective strategy because the intensity of an attack is often reduced when a person feels heard and understood.

D. Ask about the consequences of behavior: couples are encouraged to find out the specific problematic effects their behavior is having on their partner.

II. When criticized, agree with the speaker

A. Couples are taught to agree with the truth when the other person's criticism is factually correct. "You're right, I am angry....defensive....late.") Agreeing with the facts does <u>not</u> mean accepting the judgments that often accompany them.

B. Couples also learn to agree with the odds. "Youre right; if I don't smoke less and exercise more I'll probaly end up with a heart attack.")

C. Finally, couples are encouraged to agree with their partner's perception. This does not mean agreeing with their judgments, but rather their right to perceive things their way.

(Adler, 1977, pp. 191-200.)

<u>Instructional Procedures</u>:

1. Working in groups of 4 or 5, students are given the following critical statement: "Sometimes I think you don't take me seriously. It seems like everything I say goes in one ear and out the other. Groups are then given the task of responding functionally to the criticism in writing using the following outline:

A. Questioning Responses
   1. Ask for specifics
   2. Guess about specifics
   3. Paraphrase the speaker's ideas
   4. Ask for consequences

B. Agreeing Responses
   1. Agree with the truth
   2. Agree with the odds
   3. Agree with partner's perception

2. Each group sends one volunteer to participate with the instructor in front of the class. The instructor, roleplaying the marital partner, gives the student one of the following critical statements to respond to. The rest of the group may act as "coach" by suggesting effective responses for the student to use.

   A. "You know, you're sure sensitive to criticism. You shouldn't be so touchy -- it'll only get you in trouble."

   B. "You've certainly been in a lousy mood lately. Sometimes you're awfully hard to live with."

   C. "You're going to have to do a better job around here. I just don't think you're trying your hardest."

   (Adler, 1977, pp. 203-206.)

SPEAKING SKILLS: SENDING MESSAGES TO MARITAL PARTNERS

It would not be pragmatic or realistic to encourage couples to have fewer disagreements, to argue less frequently, or to refrain from criticizing behaviors they find aversive in the other. People can learn, however, to send messages which (a) increase the flow of direct information between partners and (b) make negative information less threatening and more acceptable to receive. For this unit on speaking skills, the instructional procedures are not presented until the basic message strategies have first been explained. This gives couples an opportunity to combine and integrate skills in their practice sessions. Utilizing the following speaking skills, then, couples are taught procedures for discussing and working on relationship issues.

1) Non-accusative language: Couples are made aware of the direct and indirect ways that marital partners accuse each other. The class explores the nature, extent and likely response to accusative statements as well as possible alternatives.

2) "I" statements: Couples are taught how to report their own thoughts, feelings, intentions by increasing their use of "I," "me," and "mine" statements, and, at the same time, recognizing and avoiding speaking for others with

"you," "should," "ought" language.

3) Feeling descriptions: Students are taught the importance of identifying and expressing their feelings. The class explores some difficulties associated with making feeling statements, including the habit of disclosing feelings indirectly by substituting opinions, evaluations, questions for statements of feelings. To clarify the difference between feeling descriptions and other kinds of verbal behavior, students are given a "Feeling Chart:"

I feel... a little / somewhat / very

Positive

relaxed	secure	peaceful
calm	strong	confident
glowing	happy	interested
warm	busy	turned on
sexy	content	ambitious
excited	loving	imaginative
willing	bubbly	close-to-you

Negative

grouchy	alone	frustrated
sad	dumb	sorry
anxious	trapped	incompetent
tired	put down	rebellious
nervous	silly	confused
ashamed	shy	listless
bored	hurt	depressed
	guilty	restless

(Gottman, et al., 1976, p. 32.)

4) Intention descriptions: Students are taught how to state intentions directly, thereby letting their partner know what they want, short range or long range. They learn to directly state what they would or would not like or want to do. Hidden agendas are explained and discussed as they apply to marital communication.

5) Pinpointing and documenting: Students are taught to specifically describe and report on the sense data they receive which leads them to a given interpretation or impression. The essence of pinpointing is being specific about time, location, behavior. The more specific the statement, the more helpful it is likely to be in helping the partner to understand the other's

point of reference. Documenting avoids labeling and making global judgments about a partner's behavior. It clarifies the data that a person is operating from and allows the partner to explain how he or she is responding to the same data. By avoiding global judgments about personality and character, pinpointing makes a "yes, you are/no, I'm not" argument less likely.

6) Editing: This communication skill is taught in response to the research finding that the main difference in the communication of strangers and people married to each other is that married people interrupt each other more, put each other down more frequently, hurt each other's feelings more often and are generally less complimentary to each other (Gottman, et al., 1976, p. 45). Monitoring potentially volatile messages and adapting them so that they may be more easily received by the partner, at times means eliminating the message entirely. At other times it involves restructuring the language of the message. (For additional information, see Gottman, et al., 1976, pp. 45-60.) One way to increase effective editing is through covert rehearsal in which students learn to practice communicating difficult messages in their imaginations before delivering them in the real life situation.

Instructional Procedures: Sending Messages to Marital Partners:

1. Speaking skills: The first instructional procedure is designed to give couples some written practice with each speaking skill. Students are put in groups of 4 or 5 and given 15-20 minutes to develop three statements which report something positive and three statements which report some negative feeling. Each statement must contain: non-accusative language, "I statements," feeling description, intention description, pinpointing. Groups then share responses with the class which discusses the statements and suggests alternatives. This activity is designed to clarify confusion that students nevitably have at this point prior to their using the skills in an interpersonal context.

2. Pinpointing: Instructors (or two student volunteers) roleplay a marital interaction involving some issue of conflict. During the roleplay the class

takes careful notes on (a) specific behaviors they observe and (b) interpretations they make from this observed behavior. Students are directed to fully document their interpretations with specific behaviors. Following the roleplay students discuss and compare their observations.

3. Some practice with partners: Students are now ready to use the speaking skills to discuss actual relationship issues. Their choice of discussion topic is based on the areas of enhancement they have chosen to work on. They begin this assignment by discussing one aspect of the enhancement area they find to be pleasurable. After they have done this to the satisfaction of both, they proceed to discuss aspects of the area that they find displeasing or unhelpful. Couples are reminded to utilize speaking and listening skills throughout these discussions.

ARGUING BEHAVIORS

Since it appears that argument is an inevitable part of living intimately with another person, a critical issue becomes how to deal with those times of anger in a constructive and productive manner. In research conducted at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School (Mitchell, Ballard, and Mudd, 1962, pp. 88-93), it was discovered that the difference between married partners who seek help for their problems and those who label themselves as successfully functioning does not lie in the nature of the issues that create conflict.[1] However, although similarity was found in the ranking or problem areas for both groups, the conflictive group had a higher frequency of arguments. This suggests that married partners face similar problems and what separates distressed from non-distressed couples may be the ability to functionally resolve the problems that confront them. According to Birchler, Weiss and Vincent (1975), conflict in marriage may be viewed as a demand for immediate change in partner behavior. A

[1]The top five problem areas for both groups were: household management, personality disagreement, sexual adjustment, sharing household tasks.

dysfunctional pattern of aversive control exists when punishment rather than positive reinforcement is used as the primary change agent. This often leads to "reciprocal aversiveness without concomitant problem solving" (Birchler, Weiss, and Vincent, 1975); the issue which began the discussion is never resolved. The nature of these findings suggests a need to teach couples more effective strategies for resolving conflict. Toward this end, couples first explore behaviors associated with dysfunctional arguing. Then a 4-step procedure for intimate problem solving is offered as an alternative.

Instructional Procedures:

1. Dysfunctional arguing: In groups of 5 or 6 (marital partners are not included in the same group) students brainstorm a detailed list of destructive arguing behaviors. From this list each group develops a roleplay scene which demonstrates the dysfunctional behaviors. Each group presents its roleplay to the class which tries to clarify and describe the problematic arguing patterns.

2. Functional arguing: This procedure is based on Olson and Ryder's "Inventory of Marital Conflicts" (IMC). The IMC was originally developed to obtain reliable and valid interaction data on decision making processes and conflict resolution from couples. (Olson and Ryder, 1970). The IMC consists of 18 vignettes which present various types of marital conflicts generally relevant to couples. Following are some examples of conflict-inducing situations taken directly from the IMC:

1. Husband watching football game on TV
2. Wife's lateness for dinner engagements
3. Husband distributing clothes around house after work
4. Decision to have baby
5. Husband's party behavior
6. Evening entertainment
7. Husband spends too much time at office
8. Wife's or husband's smoking habits

For each of these vignettes, two points of view are presented to encourage disagreement. Husbands receive information slanted to make the wife seem responsible in the conflict and the wives receive information slanted toward husband blame. Then each partner is asked (1) who is primarily responsible and (2) how the conflict might be most effectively resolved.

3. An approach to intimate problem solving: Students are given a handout which explains a four-step procedure for systematically working through potentially turbulent relationship issues (see page 38). After the four steps are explained by the instructor, students are put in groups and asked to apply the procedure to a written situation involving fictional characters (see page 39). Each group applies the four-step problem solving approach to the situation, demonstrating how conflict can be productively resolved.

4. Couple problem solving: At this point couples apply the problem solving format to some issue in their own relationship. This issue may or may not be based on an area of enhancement currently being worked on.

INTIMATE PROBLEM SOLVING

1. Define the problem: Bring up your awareness of the issue or problem. Both partners should be mutually satisfied with the definition of the problem. (Use active listening and pinpointing.)
2. Explicitly state feelings about the issue: Explore and share feelings concerning the problem through the use of paraphrasing and feeling statements. Be sure you both understand (although not necessarily agree with) the other's feelings before you proceed.
3. Suggest solutions for problem: Have a brainstorming session. Openly negotiate and compromise. The solution that's ultimately reached must be satisfactory to both persons. If it is not, the solution will probably not work.
4. Decide on time to meet again: Establish a specific time when you will meet again specifically to discuss and evaluate your progress in solving the problem. This is a special time for perception checking and possible renegotiation.

SOME PRACTICE WITH INTIMATE PROBLEM SOLVING

Sally:

Burned up. You've just returned with your husband Paul from a night out with his friends and he didn't pay attention to you all night, except to give you a disgusted stare when you told a joke which no one found funny. What a lousy bastard he turned out to be. When you were first married eight months ago, he was sweet as can be; now you can hardly tell it's the same person. And while you still like him very much and would like to continue the relationship, you're not one to take treatment like this lying down. Paul thinks he is a big man, but you know his soft spots -- like his stupid mother, the effeminate way he holds himself, his lowly clerk's job at Safeway and that moronic bunch of people he calls friends. Let him know when he crosses you he's crossing the wrong person.

Paul:

Disgusted. You've just returned with your wife Sally from a night out with your friends, and she insists on telling those stupid jokes which no one ever laughs at; it makes you feel like crawling under the table. Whay can't she just sit there quietly and laugh at the men's jokes like the other women do? She seemed so much quieter when you were first married eight months ago, but now she never shuts up. Basically, you still feel a great deal of affection for Sally and don't want to give up on the relationship, but she's got to learn to hold her tongue. See if you can make her see your concern in this matter.

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